When to Use 1-year, 3-year, or 5-year Estimates

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American Community Survey (ACS)

When to Use 1-year, 3-year, or 5-year Estimates

Choosing which dataset involves more than simply considering the population size in your area. You must think about the balance between currency and sample size/reliability/precision.

For details, research implications, and examples, see "Understanding and Using ACS Single-Year and Multiyear Estimates," page 9 in General Data Users Handbook.

Distinguishing features of ACS 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year estimates

1-year estimates	3-year estimates*	5-year estimates
12 months of collected data	36 months of collected data	60 months of collected data
Example:	Example:	Example:
2014 ACS 1-year	2011-2013 ACS 3-year	2010-2014 ACS 5-year
estimates	estimates	estimates
Date collected	Date collected between:	Date collected between:
between:	January 1, 2011 and	January 1, 2010 and
January 1, 2014	December 31, 2013	December 31, 2014
and		
December 31,		
2014		
Data for areas with populations of 65,000+	Data for areas with populations of 20,000+	Data for all areas

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Less reliable than 3-year or 5-year	More reliable than 1-year; less reliable than 5-year	Most reliable
Most current data	Less current than 1-year estimates; more current than 5-year	Least current
Best used when	Best used when	Best used when
Currency is more	More precise than 1-year,	Precision is more important
important than	more current than 5-year	than currency
precision	Analyzing smaller	Analyzing very small
Analyzing large	populations	populations
populations	Examining smaller	Examining tracts and other
	geographies because	smaller geographies
	1-year estimates are not	because 1-year estimates
	available	are not available

*ACS 3-year estimates have been discontinued. The 2005-2007, 2006-2008, 2007-2009, 2008-2010, 2009-2011, 2010-2012 and 2011-2013 ACS 3-year estimates will remain available to data users, but no new 3-year estimates will be produced. Every community in the nation will continue to receive a detailed statistical portrait of its social, economic, housing and demographic characteristics through 1-year and 5-year ACS products.

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